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Ex-C.I.A. Head Now Works for a Nuclear Freeze

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WASHINGTON, June 13 — Eight years ago, while this city was undergoing its post-Watergate cleansing, William E. Colby did something unusual for a director of Central Intelligence.

He disclosed the agency's "family jewels," as its dark secrets and illegal activities were called by insiders, before a Senate committee. At the same time he turned over to the Justice Department the findings of an internal inquiry that led to the prosecution of Richard Helms, one of his predecessors, for lying to Congress about C.I.A. activities in Chile.

The agency's old guard reacted with harsh accusations and innuendoes. Some, including James J. Angleton, who had been ousted as head of counterintelligence by Mr. Colby, suggested at the time that he might be a Soviet mole; others accused Mr. Colby of paralyzing the agency's ability to conduct covert operations by kneeling before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence as if it were, in the words of one former C.I.A. director, "a mourner's bench." President Ford asked for Mr. Colby's resignation in late 1975.

These days Mr. Colby, who practices international law here, is again playing a surprising role for a former director of Central Intelligence. He has joined the public debate on nuclear arms control on the side of the Catholic bishops and the nuclear freeze movement, and this has brought a new round of criticism of Mr. Colby by some of his old C.I.A. colleagues who never forgave him for opening the agency's black bag to the world.

Known as a 'Soldier-Priest'

"My position is a little incongruous for a former C.I.A. man, and I understand that," he said, adding that, contrary to what some are saying, neither religion nor guilt brought him to his present view.

Still, friends and critics alike, including two former directors of Central Intelligence, suggest privately that Mr. Colby, known around the C.I.A. as the "soldier-priest," may be motivated in part by his deep commitment to his Roman Catholic faith and a sense of guilt from some of the most painful periods of his life.

After he was appointed C.I.A. Director in 1973, antiwar groups tacked up posters in Washington labeling Mr. Colby a "murderer" and war criminal for his role in directing Operation Phoenix, an effort to identify and recruit or imprison leaders of the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Some 20,000 Vietcong "suspects" were killed during the operation. Mr. Colby told a House committee that there had been some "excesses" despite his rules against illegal killings, but he insisted that the program had, on the whole, been successful.

Still, Mr. Colby was shaken by suggestions that he had condoned political assassinations. "How does it feel to be married to a war criminal?" he asked his wife when the posters went up.

His public tribulations were matched by his personal grief. In 1971 his eldest daughter died in Washington after a long illness, and friends say Mr. Colby, who was stationed in Vietnam during the years her health was deteriorating, felt a sense of guilt for not having spent more time with her.

Practical and Moral Aspects

Mr. Colby, whose poker player's face rarely betrays his emotions or private thoughts, nodded slightly as a reporter repeated this speculation about why he went from the cold to the freeze.

"If I were taking the other side, nobody would bat an eyebrow about it," he said. "I felt this way long before the bishops' letter came out and, in fact, I helped to some degree in explaining the issue to Catholic groups. I figure the priests can take care of the moral aspects and I'll talk about the practical aspects."

Mr. Colby, who is waging his personal freeze campaign on the speaking circuit and in newspaper columns, contends that his antinuclear activities are "a logical extension of what I was doing in the intelligence business."

He goes on: "At the C.I.A. it became obvious to me that the real function of intelligence is not to win battles but to help with the peace, to avoid the kind of destabilizing surprises that

can occur. It is clear to me that the arms race has us on the verge of another one of these terrible destabilizing steps that is moving us toward a hair-trigger world with all this talk of launch under attack. My God, we're talking about the fate of the world."

If Mr. Colby's former colleagues in the intelligence community are perplexed by the latest public role of this man who calls himself "an unreconstructed cold warrior," so are some liberals who have welcomed him into the ranks of the nuclear freeze movement despite his support for the Reagan Administration's policies in El Salvador and his unwavering defense of American involvement in Vietnam.

James R. Schlesinger, a former C.I.A. director, said that the freeze movement, "if anything but a political gesture, could be detrimental to the overall military balance." He said he did not doubt his former colleague's sincerity, but, like some other members of the national security community, said he felt that Mr. Colby's words were taking a turn toward stridency.

Mr. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense in the Nixon and Ford Administrations, said he read with dismay Mr. Colby's recent remarks to an antinuclear group at Georgetown University. Mr. Colby told that audience: "I think it's time for people to take this matter away from the priesthood that has gotten us into this mess and to simply insist that we stop building these things."

In an interview, Mr. Schlesinger said: "I get restless, and I suspect others do too, over firebrand comments about a supposed nuclear priesthood. Bill knows better than that. Discussions regarding nuclear strategy have been quite open, more

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